

©IDOSR PUBLICATIONS

International Digital Organization for Scientific Research. ISSN: 2550-7958.

IDOSR JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION AND ENGLISH 2(1) 125-141, 2017.

Participle Problems Encountered by Senior Secondary School Students in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State

Eze Dorothy Ogochukwu and Eze Helen Obiageli

Department of English and Literary Studies University of Nigeria Nsukka, Nigeria.

dorathyeze@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the participle problems encountered by senior secondary school students in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu state. English is a second language to our students and because of little provision made for the teaching of participles on the school time table, it is therefore difficult for the students to make effective use of participles in both their speech and written work. Also there is an overlap in the verb which poses a problem to learners of English as a second language. Participles which are derived from the verbs have their present and past forms as ordinary verbs. The students are accustomed to present tenses which indicate present time and participles which indicate now present time and participles which indicate now present, now past and now future time, they insist on calling the participles ending in-ing present tense no matter what time it happens to be indicating. With all these problems encountered in teaching and learning of participles, little research has been conducted in this area especially the senior secondary school in Nsukka local Government Area of Enugu State. This study is therefore designed to fill the yawning gap in order to provide a reliable data for both the teachers and students.

Keywords: Participles, problem, error. Dangling modifier and verb.

INTRODUCTION

Behaviourist regard language learning as a skill comparable to learning of other practical or complex skills like driving, blowing of flutes, playing piano etc. The behaviourists in language learning restrict themselves to external of speed behaviour. Therefore, their analysis of language use is entirely in terms stimulus and response. For them the ability to

perform in a language is presented by the possession of a set of habits which enable a speaker to respond correctly to any given stimulus [1].

Another school of thought known as the mentalists in their own view have it that a speaker of a language knows his language. They accept the fact that a speaker makes a conscious choice when he/she speaks or writes. It is their own view that the speakers use of language reflect their thought which may be entirely original or even unpredictable. More recently, the mentalists put forward a different view of error which has gained a wide acceptance. The argument in its strong form is that a learner must make errors an unavoidable and necessary part of the learning. According to Oji that:

“Errors are errors on whose lips or from whose pen they appear notwithstanding [2].

Eyisi, quoting Confucius notes that :

If the language is not what is meant, then what ought to be done remains undone; if this remains undone, morals and arts deteriorate; if moral and arts deteriorate, justice goes astray; if justice goes astray, the people will stand about in helpless confusion. Hence there must be no arbitrariness in what is said. This matters above everything [2].

Broughton et al says:

However, good the teaching and however effective the learning, there will always be a place for remedial work of one kind or another because it is beyond the capacity of human being to absorb perfectly and retain indefinitely everything he is presented with.

Hence, from one point of view, every learner needs remedial teaching after the first teaching. So errors are not the bad thing once thought but visible proof that learning is

taking place. As a student learns a language, very often, he does not know how to express what he wants to say. So he makes a guess on the basis of his knowledge of his mother tongue and of what he knows of the foreign language. This process is one of hypothesis formulation and refinement. The student develops a growing competence in the language through transitional stages, and is a sign that learning is taking place. As we shall see, some of these problems encountered in learning the participle occur as the students strives to make effective use of the language [3].

PROBLEMS OF PARTICIPLE

Mother tongue interference has been noted as one of the major factors militating against students' proficiency in the use of English language and participle in particular. Learners of English as a second language (L_2) tend to substitute the phonemes of English language with sounds in their mother tongue (L_1).

Dustan pointed out that:

A strong tendency on the part of anyone learning a second language is to use sounds, syllable structure and rhythm of his mother tongue in place of sound, syllable structure and rhythm of the language he is learning[4].

Nigerian language and English language belong to different linguistic families following the point above, our secondary school students are bound to super impose the speech pattern of their first language on English language. It is worth noting that poor quality of many of the English language teachers is an impediment to students' mastery of the language. It is observed with dismay that many of our English language teachers did not have enough exposure to the language. Worse still is the insufficiency of qualified teachers of the language and because of this, all sorts of teachers are assigned to teach English language in our secondary schools. Common sense tells us that children are like yam tendrils for the

way they are directed. The teacher like a farmer directs the children by organizing lessons, motivating the students to learn and finally directing the lesson [5].

Eyisi in her own view maintains that:

Nothing gladdens the heart of teachers than the fact that their students are doing well in their subject area. Teachers of English in Nigeria yearn to shear in this joy. Their utmost concern is how to eliminate all the errors committed by their students and to help them speak and write accurately[2].

The unfortunate thing is that in a second language situation such as the status of English in Nigeria, the errors become multifarious because students study the target language against the background of their mother tongues in which they have attained a reasonable degree of competence. As a result, in many cases, it becomes very difficult for the teacher to see them through. Also the fact that most of the English language teachers did not have enough exposure to the language during their training, they impact to the students what they think is correct and not what they know is correct [6].

Mark Damen identifies:

“Damping participle as another hindrance to students’ effective performance in easy writing. To him damping participles” “am cause serious misunderstanding in academic writing” [6].

Participles are often misused in speaking and writing. Anything that dangles is said to hang loosely without secure attachment. A participles dangles when there is no word in the sentence which it could properly modify or when it seems to be related to a word which does not convey the meaning intended. Sometimes, the use of dangling participles or modifies give a ridiculous or a humorous slant to the meaning of the sentence,

misunderstanding of what is intended in a sentence. For example, a writer may, have meant to modify the subject but word order makes the modifier seem to modify an object instead. To him “such ambiguities” can lead to unintentional humor or difficulty in understanding a sentence.

Participles or participial clause may be at the beginning or at the end of a sentence, and a participial clause is usually attached to subject, as in “walking down the street (clause) the man (subject) saw the beautiful tree (object)”. However, when the subject is missing or the participle attaches itself to another object in a sentence, the clause is seemingly, “hanging on nothing or on an entirely inappropriate noun”, it thus becomes a dangling participle, as in this sentence;

“Walking down Main Street, the trees were beautiful”. In this sentence, the walking down participle should really connect to the unmentioned seems to connect to the trees because it has no subject. Presumably, the trees are not themselves walking down the man street. Upon reflection, the participle speaker of the sentence, the participle really should connect to the unmentioned speaker of the sentence, the one doing the walking (and finding trees beautiful). When a participle phrase is placed at the beginning of a sentence, it should refer to the subject when it could not possibly modify the subject from the stand point of meaning, the sentence must be rewritten and a suitable subject supplied which it could logically modify. Consider the following sentences.

- Walking thorough the tunnel, a wallet was picked.
- Entering the harbor, the statue of liberty came into view.
- Taking the test, the teaching gave me a passing grade.

In the first sentence, the participle phrase walking thorough the tunnel modifies the subject of the sentence which is wallet. A participle used at the beginning of a sentence modifies

the subject. It is evident that the wallet was not walking through the tunnel but is the meaning conveyed by the sentence as it is written. Very often, the best way to get rid of a dangling participle is to substitute a clause for it as in the example, while we were walking through the tunnel, we picked up a wallet. In the second sentence, the participle phrase modifies the statue of liberty. But it was not the statue of liberty that was entering the harbor. The phrase which seems to be related to a word which the participle phrase modifies is not in the sentence. The sentence might be revised as follows: As we entered the harbor, the statue of liberty came into view

In the last sentence, the participle phrase modifies the word teacher. If you read the sentence carefully, you will readily see that it was not the teacher who took the test. The sentence would be correctly written if a change were substituted for the damaging phrase thus; after I took the test, the teacher gave me a passing grade.

DONALD ET AL IN THEIR OWN VIEW NOTE

Sometimes there is a word in a sentence which the participle phrase properly modifies but the participle is not placed correctly. As a result, the meaning is confused. This error is commonly referred to as misplaced modifiers [4].

When a participle phrase is wrongly placed in a sentence, it brings about confusion and misunderstanding of what is intended in a sentence. Instances of these misplaced modifiers include:

Jumping into the water, the children were rescued by the lifeguard. If you read this sentence, carefully, you will find out that the word which the participle modifies is not in the sentence. It is the word lifeguard. It was the lifeguard who jumped into the water and not the children.

The trouble with the sentence is that the participle phrase should modify the subject. The sentence might be rewritten as follows:

JUMPING INTO THE WATER, THE LIFEGUARD RESCUED THE CHILDREN.

The ever increasing size of English vocabularies results in two process: process of growth through which words enter the language and process of change, whereby words already in use undergo alternation in meaning.

Guthrie opines that: “Words after entering the language continue to have a history. They change as people do”[7].

Statement about linguistic change in Nigeria cannot be made without recourse to existing description of the language in at least two varieties of development standard and non standard usage.

The considerable amount of literature which exists on the phenomenon of bilingualism and on the importance of English as a second or official language in Nigeria suggests that a large proportion of the country’s populace uses the language. Large number of English speakers in Nigeria are uneducated and are usually confronted with the difficulties of error in the use of the language.

Bangbose quotes Banjo as classifying the uneducated varieties of English used in Nigeria into four sectors which are marked by the use of phonological and morphological features. These features are neither socially acceptable nor internationally intelligible, our secondary school students mingle with them and pick these wrong expressions. A variety

of the language according to Jowitt “is one of the many general and complete languages” (1991).

Thus we have British, American, Australian and Nigerian English as varieties of a single language in the process of language acquisition, there are bound to be differences in the individual repertoire of each speaker.

Valdes wonders “whether their perceived flaws are systematic and part of a variety of English, whether those flaws are problems of fluency selection, or whether they are both” (2003).

The use of the so called “Pidgin English” is another big problem. As it is a custom, our students especially those in secondary schools and tertiary institution use it in and outside the school, during and after lesson. Worse still is the fact that some tribes in Nigeria have “Pidgin English” as their medium of communication especially when discussing something with people of other tribes.

Guthrie maintains that:

The task of creating national standards in English fell to National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Association, whose members and representatives agonize over the challenges of defining and describing what young people ought to know and do with language[7].

Until this is done, English language learning faces a great challenge in Nigeria. Mgbodile in his own view maintains that “the average Nigerian Secondary student is confronted with enormous writing problem in English language” (1999). According to him, adolescent is growing fast and has need for written English to express his various communication needs. He discovers he cannot because he is handicapped in several ways. He is at this state

battling with problems of spelling, punctuation and grammar. To express himself adequately in written English, the student has to go beyond disjointed sentences in order to communicate through continuous writing. He has to learn how to give an adequate description or to develop an agreement in English to convince a reader. He cannot report accurately in written English because he has problems recognizing the special attributes of written English correctly. As he grows older, he will need to convey factual information through writing. For example he may have to describe how a motor can work, convey geographical or scientific information or give clear and precise instructions.

According to Mgbodile, these problems which face the average Nigerian student at the post primary school level arise not only because English is a second and not first language for the Nigerian child but mainly because at the primary school level, the average Nigerian child has not the opportunity to do much writing in English. This too is understandable because the primary school has first to teach the necessary communicative skills for the first language.

Consequently, little time is left for practice in both oral and written English. Besides, most primary schools has neither the personal foundation in any aspect of English including writing skills.

In addition, there is the influence or the society which does not provide children adequate exposure to written English. These handicaps which the child experiences in the primary school are inevitably carried forward to the secondary school.

CAUSES OF ERROR

Some of the possible reasons for errors in the use of participles include the following:

- Poor Material
- Bad Teaching

- Learning Process
- Mother Tongue Interference

POOR MATERIAL

An important factor which can produce poor learning and a potential remedial situation is the many choice of material to teach from. They must not only be, constructed on sound educational and linguistic principle but also be suitable for the part of the world they are to be used in. Many causes are not well suited for the less developed part of the world, and for the is reason, they should not be given to the students in underdeveloped countries.

BAD TEACHING

The way a teacher presents the course may lead to frequent errors by the students but very often, there are circumstances quite beyond the teacher's control which produce a remedial situation. The syllables for example, is usually not within the control of most ordinary teachers some older courses follow a linear progression from one teaching point to the next. This will enable the students to follow but if this is not done well, it will result to the student's poor performance in the new area.

LEARNING PROCESS AND MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE

It is clear that the learner brings with him one source of error. His mother tongue even more importantly, the learning process itself is the source of other errors. The most suitable course of action with present knowledge, for the reader is to reject the extreme position on one hand that errors are wrong and must be avoided at all cost by very careful drilling. On the other hand, incorrect forms are necessary, even vital and so should be actively planned into the teaching process and attempt should be made to blend the best features from both approaches into his error correction.

HOW TO HANDLE ERRORS

Behaviorist psychologist in particular emphasized the importance of massive manipulative practice of manage, often in a rather mechanical fashion to ensure correction. The drills should be structured in such a way that it may be difficult for student to make many mistakes. It is believed that contrastive analysis, comparing the learners mother tongue with the target language, would predict the difficulties a learner would encounter and so enables the teacher to concentrate on them to avoid them in handling the errors, the teacher has to first of all establish what the error is, decide how serious the mistake is, decide on the remedial teaching strategy which the teacher will use to teach the appropriate use of frauds in their social context and their correction.

Immediate feedback is extremely valuable to a student. This often follows the teacher pointing out the mistakes explaining what is wrong and attempting on the spot to give some extra practice. As this is not always easy to provide on the spur of the moment, another strategy is to postpone some items to another date and after adequate preparation, make a teaching point of them in another lesson.

It is by no means necessary or advisable that all the corrections must come from the teacher. The student himself can say what he feels he has written or said wrong.

RELEVANCE OF ERRORS TO LANGUAGE LEARNING

Errors will always be made, and they have direct implications for remedial work because they are by their nature systematic infringement of the normal rules of the language. The teacher needs to plan his remedial treatment of them into the syllables for the coming weeks or months. Quite different are the minor errors of speech or writing which everybody makes native speakers as well as non-natives. Errors are important in learning because they show the extent of learning that has taken place.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of this work have important educational implications on the secondary schools in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. First the teacher's improper knowledge of participles could be traced to the nature of their educational training. This is because participle may not have been stressed when they had their training and since nobody can give what he does not possess, the students are always the worst for it.

Again, as long as the students are denied adequate time in learning participles, the implication is that they will continue to perform poorly in English language overall results. They will also find it difficult to converse fluently with other users of the English language. Also the teachers inability to have students background in mind while preparing and delivering their lessons will result in students poor performance in the subject. Since most schools under study lack adequate qualified teachers, the consequence is that students, interest would not be properly aroused and thus resulting to poor performance both in written and speech work.

WAYS OF ENHANCING THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF THE PARTICIPLE

The teaching and learning of participles and the English language in general can be enhanced using the following approaches:

Teachers should update themselves in refresher courses from time to time. Unless a teacher is secure in fundamental knowledge of his subject matter, he can be threatened by the infinity of change. To be an effective English language teacher, therefore, one must have all-round knowledge of one's discipline.

Williams stressing good teaching method maintains “We are aiming to install the right language habits to our children that they will be able to produce almost automatically sentences conveying certain ideas”[4].

If they are to do this, the best way of teaching will be in situations which would naturally produce the patterns of words which the teacher wants to impact to the students.

Consequently, if you are teaching conditional sentences for instance, think up some conditions to do with the real life of the class.

When you are teaching letter writing, let them write real letters to real people.

It is also pertinent for teachers of English to be familiar with the students native language interference problems which they will naturally face.

At the upper classes of secondary school, the students should learn how to use appropriate links to bring sentences together to form connected writing for the purpose of expressing himself when describing what he has seen, heard or read. He should also learn the use of appropriate words, phrase and sentence patterns to describe persons, situation and events and to express personal reactions to them. In this way, the problem of misplaced modifiers will be minimized.

Improved working conditions for the English language teachers would have direct impact on their performance. This could be achieved through prompt payment of salaries and other employments, reward for excellent performance, engaging them in training and re-training programmes and workshops.

Teachers of other subjects should be enjoined to pick interest in firming correct sentence structures so as to reinforce the effort of the English language teachers.

Above all, it is believed that availability and skillful use of teaching aids will motivate the students and lead to their further interest in English language.

In other words, adequate provision of suitable teaching and their effective utilization are sine quo non to an ideal teaching and learning the English language.

Schools should encourage co-curricular activities such as drama, debates, reading passages, writing essays and other practices. This will help the students to improve on their use of participles both in speech and written work.

Finally, the use of vernacular and Pidgin English by the students within their school premises should be discouraged.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is evident that lack of motivation, influence of the first language and the teacher's incompetence owing to inadequate training, lack of adequate English teachers, non devotion to duty by teachers and irregular or absence of supervision of the teacher's work are all serious problems to the teachers of the English language in secondary schools.

In some cases, we do not have enough English language teachers from survey in schools there is therefore the tendency for non English Language teachers to teach the subject in schools. The implications is poor performance in learning and instruction. Sometimes the English language teachers may not have been well trained to carry out the assignment. The trained ones are recruited into few privileged upper class schools. There are less qualified teachers teaching the subject. This should be checked by the state government for proper grooming of every student learning English language in secondary schools.

Similarly, it is also observed that enough period is not used to teach participle since the same English language teacher handles literature in English along with some post of responsibilities.

The proper intellectual development of a child can be ensured by continual instruction in the language the child has known and spoken from birth. This is his mother tongue.

It is therefore, necessary that he continues using this language all through his formal educational career. Learning English as a second language has a number of linguistic and socio-cultural implications which make identification of the contrasting features of the two languages important for effective teaching and learning of the target language. Certain structures and constructions are subject to negative transfer and will appear in the target language as influenced by the native language. The transfer usually applied to the grammatical structures of

the target language. Therefore, proper grooming of students in grammar, semantics and phonetics will go a long way in helping the students.

Finally negative attitude of the student, poor learning environment, ignorance of parents and guardians, influence of Pidgin English and poor rating of teachers by the general public have all been established as great impediments to the teaching and learning of participles in the secondary schools in Nsukka local government Area of Enugu State.

REFERENCES

1. Bangbose. A “*The English Language in Nigeria*” In Spencer John (ed) *In the English language in West African London* 1971
2. Eyish, J. *Common Errors in the use English* African first publisher limited 2004.
3. Clif . N, “*The Fastest way to learn* [http://www.clifnotes.com/what are- participle-id](http://www.clifnotes.com/what-are-participle-id) 2003
4. Donald et al, *Dictionary of the English language* A hand book on the sound system for teachers of English London and Harlow 1969
5. Jowih, D. *Nigerian English usage: An introduction* Ikeya Longman 1999
6. Mark Damen. *Writing Guide: Dangling Participles* <http://www.usu.edu/markdamen/writingguide/dangpt.ttm>.2010
7. Valdes, G. *Non Native English Speakers: Language bigotry in English Mainstream Classroom*.<http://webz.ade.org/ade/bulletin/N124/124012.htm>.2003